

**Meeting Date:** May 22, 2008

**Agenda Item No. 13**

**Agenda Item:** Sage-grouse Update

**Approved by:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Prepared by:** Jeff Gould

**Background:**

Greater sage-grouse occupy about half of their historic range and their population was estimated at 100,000-500,000 grouse rangewide in 2004. Recent surveys indicate the reproductive and survival rates are down from previous years in portions of Idaho while other areas remain stable. This is also the case across their range, and biologists are pooling survey information in an attempt to discern a rangewide trend. Meanwhile, land managers recognize wildfire as one of the greatest threats to sagebrush communities and work together to develop rehabilitation projects that expedite habitat recovery which can span decades. Last year, BLM estimated that nearly 750,000 acres of sagebrush was impacted by fire in Idaho. Approximately 400,000 acres was considered key sage-grouse habitat and more than 300,000 acres was treated through rehabilitation projects. This is one example of an important conservation measure taken to sustain sage-grouse in Idaho.

**Policy Issues:**

The federal government is under U.S. District Judge Lynn Winmill's order to reconsider an earlier decision (January 2005) against listing sage-grouse under the federal endangered species act as threatened or endangered. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) has until December to issue a new decision. The prospect of listing sage-grouse has far-reaching impacts on grazing, energy development (oil, gas, and wind), mining, and other activities within sagebrush habitat throughout 11 western states.

**Public Involvement Process:**

In response to a pending decision to list Greater sage-grouse under the Federal Endangered Species Act, Idaho is working with 10 other states to compile the most current information on this game bird. This includes population data such as lek count data as well as information on recent habitat changes and conservation actions. This information is due to the USFWS in late June and Idaho's input will be coordinated with other state and federal agencies as well as sage-grouse local working groups. The USFWS plans to issue a ruling on listing sage-grouse by December 2008.

**Justification:**

N/A

**Action Requested:**

No action required.

**Staff Recommendations:**

Provide recognition to federal and state agency staff that helped implement meaningful actions to restore sage-grouse habitat impacted by the Murphy Complex Fire.